

2022 Patanjali Class 61

8/15/23

Sutra II:15 – To those with unitive discrimination all is misery on account of the pain resulting from change, anxiety, and the registration and preservation of impressions, as also on account of the conflict between the functions of the triple modalities of nature.

Sutra II:16 – The pain that has not yet come is to be avoided.

Sutra 15 ends the study of afflictions, and sutra 16 begins the section on the task of the seer, although with a clever reprise of those afflictions—to wit: general ignorance, egoism, attachment, hatred, and clinging to life (respectively, *avidya*, *asmita*, *raga*, *dvesha*, *abhinivesha*.)

As Deb was recovering from skin cancer removal and not attending, I opened the class in her stead. We have finally arrived at the beginning of Patanjali's exquisite yoga presentation, after a year and a half of intensive preparation. Why such a long preparation to minimize the five afflictions and other forms of ignorance too numerous to list here? It makes sense that he didn't want anyone misinterpreting, twisting, or commandeering his beautiful vision, his baby, so made sure any devotees had gotten most of their junk out the way so as not to distort or demean it. He left it up to us to get over ourselves—our confusions, prejudices, angers, and so on, allowing us to attend more closely to what is being taught.

I reminded the class again it is actually Nitya who is doing the teaching, rather than Patanjali. The "lecture notes" style of the sutras does not tell us much, unless we already know it, and so it can act as a reminder. Nitya's or any teacher's job is to explain what these terms mean so we can put them into actual practice. Presumably, our preparation is now finished. We presently have among class members between 20 and 50 years of Yoga

preparation, so we will be approaching the upcoming revelations with cleared heads.

Curiously, the lengthy apprenticeship brought to my mind playing football in school. I loved the game and played it well for a number of years. Preparation began at the end of summer, during the year's hottest weather. You didn't get to play the game, you had to put on heavy clothing to just do calisthenics and run laps, which caused many days of pain from stressed muscles. You didn't play actual football for weeks, because you had to get in shape first. Without the dues paying, you just weren't ready to take the field.

It was an exciting moment to transition from preparatory workouts to real playing—just as we are now with Patanjali.

Jan got the class off to a good start, by noticing the different endings of Nitya's two commentaries. Sutra 15 says Patanjali's model treats the world as illusory, and advocates transcendence. Sutra 16 ends with yoga showing us how to live in the here and now. Here are the two endings, side by side:

15 - The model given in the aphorisms of Patanjali goes very much with the Vedantic notion of treating this world as illusion and therefore the resolution sought is one of transcendence rather than living the given life in the here and now.

16 - Yoga does not offer a solution after death; it is showing us how to live in the here and now.

Jan called them contradictory; I suggested merely paradoxical, because both can be true. They don't cancel the other side. First of all, transcendence has to occur in the context of the here and now—it is not achieved by dying, or becoming something unprecedented. We are in a sense learning transcendence by being able to tune out our immediate, habitual reactivity to the world.

The philosophy frees us from our accumulated prejudices and biases, allowing us to transcend those but also to live better in terms of our relationships in actual life. Nitya was in favor of making philosophy real, that at its best it was not just abstract mental imagery of some far-off utopia, but pertains to how you get along the world. What we're transcending is all the accumulated stuff that isn't really us, in order to become more of what our essence is really like.

Nitya and Narayana Guru have already settled the question of illusion, spelled out perfectly in the beginning of Atmo 88:

Everything is real in itself; one who grasps the basic truth
will understand all this as one;
if not known introspectively,
maya's great enmity certainly creates much confusion.

After such a minute study of all aspects of the Self and its indivisible aloneness, even when we come to the eighty-eighth verse of *Atmopadesa Satakam* the world has not disappeared. It persists, through all the reevaluations we have had. And we are the same people. We are engaged in the same kinds of activities, and we still react to each other the same way.

If the world persists must it be real? Is it real or not? Does it exist or not exist? Narayana Guru says have no quarrel—just take it for granted the world exists. Not only this world. Whatever there is. It's all okay. *Sakalavum ullatu*, everything is real. (619)

We've just completed the section on overcoming our afflictions, and chances are we have transcended their influence to a significant degree, improving every aspect of our here-and-now existence.

This made good sense to Jan, who added that in sutra 15 Nitya had been talking about the I-Ching, how it is “a flawless book that explains the relationship of the individual both to the elements of the changing social matrix and to the cosmic flux of time.” She could see we are finding our balance between the horizontal matrix and our freedom of aloneness, and to accomplish that we’re learning to live our life grounded in the Absolute. That’s right: we are learning to live here and now optimally, by *transcending* ordinariness and regaling in the oneness. Aloneness means all-oneness. So, the apparent contradiction is in fact complementary. Nitya clarifies this in sutra 16:

You can create a conducive environment by carefully structuring your world. You can withdraw your mind from the marketplace where it gets easily soiled. Nightmares come out of you because you have irrational fears lurking in your mind. By going deeply into the areas of the mind and illuminating them with the inner light of the Self, this darkness will go. (198)

Transcendence comes not from ignoring our afflictions, but by “outing” them, then disadopting them..

For Bill, the most useful phrase, in sutra 15, was “unitive discrimination.” He thought we need to remember the self that shines, and Nitya says when we forget to do that, it gets veiled and we lose touch with that essence. Bill loved this image:

The subtle veil that hides reality is magical; it operates without giving any glimpse of its interception. As a result, we are almost oblivious of the numinous that shines forth as value in everything. (192)

Working through old Class Notes on Darsanamala, I found a most helpful section from our class on Cosmic Projection:

Nitya points out that by stopping our activities, releasing our egoistic fixations, and sinking into the quietude of the depths, we can actually have a hand in directing our energies to valuable ends. We have to drop below the level of “mine,” and if possible even below our vasanas, to have the maximum effect. Waiting until the vital urge is fully manifest in the outside world is far too late. That’s the tail end of the process, if it may be said to have an end. In any case, it’s fully objectivized. We spend our time mucking about in the outside world striving to have an impact, but Nitya suggests we engage with the other pole of the pulsation instead.

Another corollary of Nitya’s model is an answer to an often-asked question about what is the point of using words. It is true that words are to be dropped off before one can sink to the core, but life doesn’t remain only at the core. It pulsates from core to periphery and back, over and over and on many different wavelengths and time scales. Words as explicit thoughts are an integral part of the connecting links between the pure source of the core and the world in which we live and interact. By stifling or degrading the use of words in the intermediate sphere between vasanas and the outside world, that world loses its sense of meaning and becomes random and chaotic, because we have severed or curtailed our connection with it. This is a very common condition.

I didn’t read out the second paragraph, but it’s so valuable, I should have: our life pulsates between the here-and-now and the transcendental, and we do not have to declare our allegiance to one or the other pole: all of it is “us.” Most of us have lost touch with both poles, frankly, though especially the transcendental; we have to recover our aliveness to resonate with them.

I have just spent two weeks being around young children, and it's fascinating to observe how the little wheels are turning in their heads. Each is bringing the world into focus in a way unique to them, and there is no way to tell what they are making out of it. They are constructing it from the inside out, and finding their own ways to interact with the demands of their caregivers. It seems impossible for it to resemble anyone else's, yet it does work, because we are all interrelated. We learn from each other. It was obvious to me there is no fixed reality we are finally apprehending, and it convinced me more than ever that the world we perceive is completely different for everyone.

Anita is often around little children these days, and her great-grandchild Sonora is 2 years old. She watches her and she is so intelligent, even socially intelligent. If her mother mentions a problem, she might say, "That's okay mom, it will be all right." It shows Anita the power of our interactions, not just with children but with each other. We really do have an influence on one another.

Susan sent some thoughts on the topic:

I'm interested in commenting on the things you said about how children are all different because they take in the world, each in their own way. You did talk about that in a beautiful way, as Andy said. But there is so much that gets in the way of our taking in the world, and so many adults who would have us take in the world in *their* way. Of course I did that as a parent too. I've been reading a book called *Girlhood* by Mellissa Febos. My goddaughter recommended it. Not an easy book to read but fascinating. She talks a lot about how girls are raised to be protected and in so doing are burdened with expectations and labels. This indoctrination and projection tends to also shut girls down. It makes them less likely to speak up when things go wrong and less likely to actually find their true nature. I can

relate to this from my own pile of rules as a girl. I was pretty much stymied by all the expectations and the rules about interacting with boys, adults, emotions. Of course I have been unpacking all this through the last 20 years but I can't help but be pretty angry about the way girls are stifled. I know boys are too and non-binary people, etc. But at the moment I am sitting with the very real suppression of girls/women, which seems to be getting worse not better all over the world. Ugh.

It makes you wonder why anyone believes they have to fight to force everyone else to squeeze into their personal interpretation, as if there is only one correct way to think. Many of the religiously devout spend whole lifetimes trying to convert themselves and others to the non-self, futilely and devastatingly. Instead, we should cherish the infinitely different ways people have put together the world for their own understanding—every one of them a genius! Nitya singles out imagining there is only one right view of the world as the first cause of suffering:

After sitting in the dark of the mother's womb for nine months of preparation, the person comes out and is seated in the theater called the world. A large screen seems to be before the child, but it is actually inside. This screen is the mind. The first projection on the screen is that of the child's mother, feeding and suckling. Then comes the father and perhaps brothers and sisters. The child does not merely see them, but is tied, bonded to them. These bonds are made of ropes with two strands, one of love and one of hate. These dual bonds are felt toward every item of attraction and repulsion.

The first major cause of misery is forgetting that these are all projections on the screen of the mind. It is just like weeping when you see a beloved actor in a sad movie. You forget that it is only a projection of colored film on a screen. In Indian

philosophy this is called avidya, basic ignorance. You are aware of only the projections and forget that the seer, the seeing, and the scene are all one. This ignorance of the whole story of your physical manifestation in this world is the first cause of suffering. (195-6)

Paul mused that when you transcend the differences, you can maintain your equanimity, which provides a transparency between polarities: between hate and love and what attracts and repels, with what Patanjali calls unitive discrimination. Bill added that unitive discrimination is the ability to understand, to see the coloring of our world, and once we can see those things, we can understand our true nature. Equanimity is good word to tag on to this, since when you are seeing something for what it is, you aren't excessively affected by it.

Paul really likes the word *discriminative*. For him, discriminating means to draw out differences: when you look at the polarities of life, you can discriminate between the two polarities, and yet remain unattached to whether they are positive or negative. Our identity is with the seeing—what is being seen and the act of seeing—all is a projection of one being that is the Absolute itself. If we realize we are participants, then our conditionings don't carry so much weight. They can be subjugated in a greater understanding. As Bill put it, that discrimination is coming from understanding of the one light that lights it all.

Moni spoke about sutra 15, dealing with how the conflicts between the gunas make our life miserable. We become confused, saddened, and the basis for that could be how we react to situations. Sometimes we react in a sattvic way, sometimes with rajas or tamas. As we move away from our sattvic center, there is less harmony, less peace of mind. If we approach our life in a tamasic way, we are disconnected, there is no light, we are totally confused, disappointed; finding no meaning in life, we are afraid to

face the world. We need to recognize our emotions and then come back to the center, and only then try to transcend it.

Nitya is assuring us here that we do have discrimination to choose more beneficial paths. We are not helpless victims of fate.

Moni read out an exercise of Nitya's, from his Malayalam Patanjali. First close your eyes and calm your mind. Soon you will see memories coming to you, some old, some substantial, look at them carefully and try to talk to each one in your mind, showing they are not relevant now, and then close it. If you make this a daily practice, eventually your memories subside, and your mind will come to a calmer place when you sit down to meditate.

At that stage, because you have a transcendent mind at a different level than when you started, when you see objects or people, you can tell yourself that those people are there but it's not going to control your thoughts, making your mind much easier to have interaction with people and things, moving onto a much higher transcendental state of mind.

This led seamlessly to our closing meditation, so I reneged on my promise to read Deb's astute dialectic interpretation. You can find it at the beginning of the 2010 Notes, below the 2012 ones. You won't want to miss Susan's Part II at the very end, and find the paragraph before that that started her thread.

It was lovely to be back together in the ClassZoom.

Part II

6/17/12

When I compiled a list of just the sutras for the entire study, I created subsections to help organize an overall conception of the work. They are totally my own, but I think they have some value. I included II, 15 at the end of the section titled The Afflictions, and II, 16 begins the section I called The Task of the Seer. There is

only one more section, the famous eight limbs of Yoga, starting with II, 27.

There are some classic passages in our reading for the present Lesson. I'll recap some favorites of mine. The most important one is "The first major cause of misery is forgetting that these are all projections on the screen of the mind." Our brain does such a great job of modeling the vibrations it receives that we mistake its image for reality. We really can't even begin to correct ourselves until we can distinguish the difference, at least theoretically.

Here are a few more delectations:

"All previous conditionings are focused on each image so that it becomes highly exaggerated as either very dear or very hateful. The subtle veil that hides reality is magical; it operates without giving any glimpse of its interception. As a result, we are almost oblivious of the numinous that shines forth as value in everything."

"Between the changing structure of the external world and the reciprocal disturbance happening in the human brain, many truths are annulled, many lies are added, and the poor organism has to contend with what is allotted to it by the niggardly provision of a stepmother-like nature."

"Each of us creates our own world and then complains about the environment."

"You can use your intelligence to mitigate the suffering coming from unavoidable situations."

"Yoga does not offer a solution after death; it is showing us how to live in the here and now."

This last quote is similar to one I like from my own work, commenting on the Gita, III, 7, about unitive action: “Life is not a problem to be solved but an adventure to be lived.”

As to the exercise, with its excellent list of possible corrections we can bring to bear in so many situations, obviously this is a lifelong practice, not something where we can just sit for a few days and then report on miraculous changes that have occurred. It does make me think about the problems everyone has been writing about in our group, and the heroic struggles we, as perfectly typical humans, are undergoing. I’m always encouraged and inspired to hear about even very small incremental improvements from everyone else. They are instructive and exciting. It’s easy to relate the problems to ourself, because functionally we are all very similar. (Another unhelpful affliction is to imagine we are different from everyone else, and that only *they* have problems. I guess that’s a subset of *asmita*, ego-identity.)

Looking back on my life, I have just barely avoided many powerfully binding disasters. Up till now, the ones I have found myself in have been repairable, thank heaven. But I marvel at the pitfalls and abysses I have inexplicably avoided while walking blindly along a razor’s edge. I am grateful to all my gurus for guiding me in my blindness, especially of course Nitya. The wonderful list of surefire techniques in the Exercise is one example, but his personal (bountiful) criticism has been the greatest blessing of all. For instance, I’m pretty sure that I would naturally avoid confronting my irrational fears if he hadn’t thrown them in my face, and more than once at that.

Rene Daumal, in *Mount Analogue*, has a fabulous section about how the huge metaphorical mountain of the title, which connects earth with heaven, could rest unnoticed on the planet. Since anything that reaches heaven must have a nearly infinite mass, its gravity must bend light right around it, and ships likewise

sail around it. Both ship and sight appear to be going straight, but they are in fact effortlessly and unwittingly detouring around the objective. Such are our “irrational fears” or our traumas: so heavy that they bend gravity, thereby creating a protective nest that ordinary thinking cannot access. Luckily for us, a guru of profound insight is not affected by the gravity of the situation, and can put his finger right on our sore spots.

In *Mount Analogue*, Father Sogol (that’s Logos backwards) is able to calculate the location of the mountain with logic and mathematics. We too can infer our hidden mountain ranges if we can clear our minds enough to unwarp our vision. It takes a combination of withdrawing from chaotic and harmful practices and a prospective digging in the dirt to root them out. I’ve had my share of harmful practices, and I know how hard it is to let them go. It looks like addictive behaviors are on the increase these days, if that’s even possible. I can only be grateful that a combination of factors—guru exhortations, family and job requirements, an active questioning mind, and a weak but not totally dissipated willpower—somehow managed to outweigh the attractions of at least the most obvious of the afflictions. I shudder to think what might have happened to me if I had been caught by any of them, and am grateful every day for the freedom I enjoy thanks to so many benign forces in the environment, none of which depended on me deserving them, or all would have been lost.

Yes, the pain that has not yet come is to be avoided, but left to ourselves we aren’t clever enough to see it coming. It’s well hidden behind the lurid attractions of the carnival of human enterprise. Only when the fires scorch our derriere do we take action, mostly. I am thankful I at least recognized my own shortcomings and was willing to listen, and with good fortune I could sit at the feet of real teachers instead of the pretenders and dissemblers the world abounds in. Wow. Close call.

(I'm tacking on the most excellent list for reference, but it doesn't need to be reprinted in the responses.)

One Exercise:

(Nancy Y put this together from the text)

Foster your capacity to distinguish between the avoidable and unavoidable situations of life, to avoid the avoidable, and to improve the unavoidable, by activating one or all of the corrections of suffering that Guru compassionately outlines for us:

- understand the screen on which the play of life is projected and that you are not different from the experiences you are projecting
- create a conducive environment by carefully structuring your world
- withdraw your mind from the market place where it gets easily soiled
- respond to your nightmares arising from irrational fears by going deeply into the areas of the mind and illuminating them with the inner light of the Self
- see the impermanence of the causes of misery
- avoid that which can be avoided, mitigate that which can be mitigated
- live simply

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7/27/10

Sutra II:15

To those with unitive discrimination all is misery on account of the pain resulting from change, anxiety, and the registration and preservation of impressions, as also on account of the conflict between the functions of the triple modalities of nature.

Sutras II:15 and 16 are among Nitya's most masterful expositions, and round out the lengthy discussion of the afflictions with profound insight.

Deb noticed the secret plan of Nitya's commentary and made it explicit for us. What we still call the West, though it is no longer localized anywhere, is a linear, pragmatic and highly simplified attitude about cause and effect. It strikes a thoroughly positivist pose that allows its votaries to steamroller over obstacles.

Religious people often have a negative attitude about life, that it is a vale of tears and the abode of suffering. This leads to withdrawal and a lack of coherent action, a knuckling under to fate in place of taking fate into their own hands. Nitya, probably in part to make a point to his audience at the time, characterized this attitude as Indian. He later mitigated its racial sting by describing that type of negativity as a search for truth.

Much of his commentary dealt with the traditional Chinese appreciation of yin and yang, the positive and negative aspects of life, as being equal in the overall analysis. Although many of us tend to exaggerate the negative and minimize the positive, in a dispassionate view they are well balanced. Again in a veiled criticism of escapist tendencies within the Gurukula gang, Nitya says, "The Chinese people are not afraid to face the enormity of the challenge of life and they are therefore willing to accept each situation as a paradoxical coming together of two opposites." He adds that they are humble enough to have open minds, which abets a healthy way forward.

Nitya's citing of the West, Indians and Chinese is a neat trick to catch people's attention through their identities, but the underlying subtext is positivity as a thesis, negativity as an antithesis, and their blending as a synthesis. There is a dialectic thread running through the whole commentary. Despite the way it is sketched out, each of us embodies all those possibilities, though we may get stuck on one or the other due to habits of mind.

Transcending all of these is Patanjali's yoga, which in the ultimate analysis is detached from all practical considerations. As Nitya puts it, "The model given in the aphorisms of Patanjali goes very much with the Vedantic notion of treating this world as illusion and therefore the resolution sought is one of transcendence rather than living the given life in the here and now."

The wonderful thing about attending a guru darsana is that the audience is led to inwardly experience each stage of this development. To those of heightened attention, there is a mystical training of the inner being operating in parallel with the words being spoken. Unfortunately, in reading a book we can only infer this subtle aspect.

In analyzing the words alone, some of us were brought up short at the idea of aloneness, which has become synonymous in modern usage with separation and isolation. 'Alone' is actually a contraction of 'all one'. The state of oneness is what is meant by the assertion that aloneness is the final goal of Patanjali's yoga. Where there is only one there is no other. While we have come to depend on others to make us feel complete, all of that is truly within us. Oneness enables independence, along with the termination of separation and isolation.

Similarly, 'atonement' has come to be a punitive term implying recompense for sin. Yet it is a contraction of 'at one-ment'. Restoring our state of oneness eradicates the errors of acting selfishly. Nitya writes:

In pure spirit, there is nothing specific. The projected specificity of each gestalt that is presented to consciousness not only hides the unitive reality of the Self but also alienates us from our absolute nature and brings us into encounter after encounter in which the time sequence is very pronounced.

(191)

In addition, misery and suffering are pronounced within self-alienation. Restoring all-oneness with a transcendental understanding brings misery and suffering to a close, which is the true meaning of atonement.

By contrast, if we rely on nature to provide our happiness, we find that sooner or later it fails us. The side of us that comes from nature is doomed to fall apart, suffer pain, and be recycled in death. In addition, clever people have found ways to sweep the bounty of many into their own pockets, causing a severe imbalance between rich and poor. This is not possible with spirit, because our true being cannot be sequestered or stolen, but it is with nature. This is what Nitya meant when he shocked most of us in the class by saying, “Between the changing structure of the external world and the reciprocal disturbance happening in the human brain, many truths are annulled, many lies are added, and the poor organism has to contend with what is allotted to it by the niggardly provision of a step-mother-like nature.”

Like happiness and true Happiness, joy and true Joy, we should also distinguish between nature and true Nature. Our language hasn't yet developed separate terms for these absolutely different concepts. The nature that is opposed to spirit is not the same as our true nature, which is the beingness that transcends the duality of spirit and nature.

My take on the stepmother reference is that Mother Nature does provide beautifully for our needs, but as man has assumed the role of the allotter of goods, he has become stingy and partisan. You have to play along to claim your reward, and if you don't you are sentenced to a life of misery and endless toil. Where nature is egalitarian, human schemes are almost always partisan.

Throughout his life and especially at the time the present commentary was being dictated in classes, Nitya was very much in tune with what is called communism. The term has been poisoned by the propaganda of those in the catbird seat, but it is essentially

intended as a way of equalizing distribution and reducing the extreme disparity between the haves and the have nots. A new book entitled *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, documents how inequality negatively impacts all aspects of society, including those best off. As the American Empire self-destructs in a blaze of ignominy, this would be obvious but for the ceaseless disinformation preached by every mass media choir. It's like watching a plane crash and blaming the stewardess, and best of all having near universal agreement that she was the cause. To suspect the pilot or the mechanism would be unpatriotic. Unfortunately, such hubris doesn't help avoid the crash. At the heart of our studies is a deep commitment to become honest enough to bring our own jets back into level flight.

When I had mentioned how Nitya would very subtly criticize and energize his audience without anyone being aware that he was doing so, as in this commentary, Anita wanted to know exactly what he wanted us to do. What is the "doing" of a dedicated disciple or other interested party?

What we are called upon to do is pay attention, listen carefully and with full attention, and then relate the teaching to our own self. This is harder than it sounds. The mind likes to wander, and we prefer to reflect how the teaching is about all those other fools and really, we already have got it down. Only we haven't. We have to look hard at the meaning and at ourselves and see how they fit together. The guru stands as an open invitation to enter the magic circle of self-discipline and gradual transformation, but all us blushing brides are embarrassed to accept it most of the time. Who knows when we might take the plunge?

Happily, Anita had not one but two stories about how she was surprised to find that the teachings had transformed her without her consciously realizing it. This type of wisdom transmission is subtle, even invisible. Doing calisthenics, praying,

following rituals, counting 10,000 beads, all that stuff is obvious and easy to keep track of. You measure your “spiritual progress” by how much of whatever program you perform, and no one has to question whether it has any real effect or not. (Answer: it mostly doesn’t.) A guru’s wisdom instruction is not tangible or measurable, and so it is easy to think of it as a waste of time. But if you sink into it, some very good things may happen when you least expect them. Nitya himself describes this, as usual without making it explicit: “The subtle veil that hides reality is magical; it operates without giving any glimpse of its interception. As a result, we are almost oblivious of the numinous that shines forth as value in everything.” The guru stands for and expresses the numinous, directing it into the hearts of those present.

Anita found herself recently in two situations that in the past would have left her crying and very upset. In both she kept her cool, and because of this she was able to assess both herself and the actions of the other people more clearly and dispassionately. The best part was that she realized how different that was for her, and that the teachings apparently were having a transformative impact after all. This is a true measure of worthwhile progress. It isn’t always easy to see the point of all this thinking, but there it is: less misery and confusion, and the ability to be a pillar of strength in a world in flux.

9/14/10

Sutra II:16

The pain that has not yet come is to be avoided.

Although the past month and a half without holding classes has been busy and full, it became increasingly obvious to me how crucial a periodic gathering for extra-deep exploration is for the psyche. I began to feel its absence quite strongly. As Nitya says in his commentary, “A drug addict looks for drugs, an alcoholic for

drink, and a lover of books for a library.” He meant himself as the third type of addict, of course. For me, I’d say that an explorer looks for things to explore, and there is no more fertile unclaimed territory beckoning than the mind and its mysterious relation to its environment. Last night’s class was not only a terrific sutra and commentary: the presence of dear friends who have stood together for a long time, dedicated to a penetrating search for truth, was palpably wonderful and uplifting, not to mention enticingly exploratory.

Deb began by acknowledging that this was yet another of Nitya’s commentaries that “said it all,” that we could just read this each week and it would be enough. We are coming to the end of the section of the study dealing with the afflictions with a generalized stock-taking. Overcoming the afflictions would most definitely be enough to align our lives as they ought to be, and all else, even samadhi, can be considered gravy.

Nitya’s orientation to the words of the sutra is that by being aware of what we would prefer to ignore, we obviate many problems. He says, “Although a situation is unavoidable, it may be possible to improve it.... You can use your intelligence to mitigate the suffering coming from unavoidable situations.” By ignoring something we don’t necessarily make it go away, because all our faults—no matter how ridiculous—look perfectly sensible to the ego. Our mind is very clever to clothe its dementias in plausible outfits. Of course, the costumes are often outlandish and ill-fitting, but we have learned to admire them and make believe that they are the latest fashion. If you’ll forgive me, it gives a whole new meaning to being caught by the modes....

Susan’s take on the sutra was almost the exact opposite of Nitya’s: she pointed out that we often anticipate problems and so cause them to happen, or at least we suffer from them as if they were real. If a pain has not yet come, why do we make such a big deal about it? And if we can stay focused on the here and now,

future pain will never arrive. While there is a value to dispassionately anticipating obstacles so they can be avoided, chronic worries about hypothetical monsters are definitely afflictions that can and should be avoided. Susan's unique take on this sutra highlights the genius of Patanjali's bare-bones koans: they can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and most of those ways are actually helpful, while none are the last word. They are jumping off points for those who aren't afraid of heights.

Going back to Nitya's perspective, we are taught to step back and examine the events of our life as they happen, because only when we detach ourselves from our incestuous self-infatuation can we begin to evidence an unbiased attitude about ourselves and our surroundings. In the way we swallow our own beliefs and regurgitate them we resemble a snake swallowing its own tail, rolling down the road in a continuous repetition of the same cycle over and over. Or like a dog chasing its tail as it stays tantalizingly just ahead of its jaws. The difference with us there is that the dog eventually catches on and stops.

Nitya adds a dimension here to his earlier metaphor of being seated in a movie theater, likening the egg we spring from to a throne, and the sperm to the king or queen who sits on it. During gestation the two aspects become riveted together, fused into a single being. Soon the thoroughly bound entity enters the theater of the world, without realizing that the screen it is entranced with is within its own mind. The show is so realistic that each of us is taken in, often for our whole life, by what Indian philosophy calls our basic ignorance, *avidya*: the inability to separate ourselves from the projected action, to know we are more than what appears on the screen. Only if we can somehow come to understand that we are glued to our seats in a theater of the absurd can we ever begin to grow in any meaningful sense of the word. Otherwise we are stuck fast.

The class spent a lot of time in rueful acknowledgment of Nitya's sentence, "Each of us creates our own world and then complains about the environment." We love to grouse about the other and its faults, and many of us dedicate our whole lives to sparring with our own shadow in this fashion. It's as though we ratify ourselves by denigrating the other—too bad the other is in fact us! If a rishi were to insinuate that we were battling chimeras and in the process splitting ourselves in two, we would run them out of town or nail them to a cross: our projections are that convincing and the mitigating of them is that frightening a prospect.

One of the mysterious subtleties here is that we are most definitely projecting the world, but that doesn't mean we can have a direct effect on it. Learning what actually has an impact is a very tricky business, requiring diligence and an ability to think outside the box. Literally.

The world's existence is amazingly complicated, and like a film unreeling before our eyes, much of it is prerecorded. Since the movie is already produced, there isn't much we can do once it is playing other than defacing the equipment, which is a popular enough activity for frustrated souls. But to have a beneficial effect we need to get back into the editing room and study the film itself, and also learn some good film technique that we can actually put into practice to get better footage.

The flip side of believing that we are capable of altering the movie after it is on the screen is that we believe we can make it disappear if we withdraw into ourselves. We may shut our eyes tight and pretend there is no movie, but it is still playing to a packed house. In some systems, the tighter your eyes are closed, the more "spiritual" you are. But Nitya counsels us to keep our eyes wide open, because our work occurs in relation to the movie, not in spite of it. Seer and seen go together. Yet because the film is at least partially our projection, we can make positive changes by

working with it. We cannot just fervently hope for the film to be different and expect it to change, but we can engage with it and transform our experience for the better.

Yoga isn't about wishing for a fancy car and having one appear, or pretending a problem doesn't exist and having it go away. Don't laugh: these are very common attitudes. Too bad they miss the point.

As Deb explained, there is an actual world for us to contend with. The idea is that how we interpret that world makes all the difference in our internal state. We can be ecstatic or miserable over the same film clip. But despite the hopes of many scientists and politicians to isolate an utterly determined world without any possibility of free will, we do have a role to play, and knowing how and where to put our energies is a key to a fulfilling life.

Jan revealed that she has been realizing over the summer how relevant these seemingly obscure sutras were to her everyday life. Of course, relevance is the main thrust of the Gurukula's orientation. As Nitya concludes, "Yoga does not offer a solution after death; it is showing us how to live in the here and now." Jan was surprised that something so amorphous could be so helpful to her, and that the normal programs of most institutions, specifying in elaborate detail the permissible prescriptions for every occasion, actually fail to be helpful and instead are binding and lacking in soulful nuance. This is why Nataraja Guru equated the Absolute with maximum generality. The more general a concept, the more inclusive it is; the Absolute is the concept that is wholly inclusive, with nothing whatsoever left out. We bring specific instances of the general to life as we experience them, but it is a failure of imagination to project the specifics back onto the general and assume it is an adequate explanation. The proper orientation in this instance is called gratitude.

Henri Bergson had the same idea in mind when he spoke of the gold coin which no amount of copper pennies could equal.

Pennies are specific items of limited value, while the Absolute is of unlimited value. It is a common mistake of our materialistically educated brains to believe we can tote up a big enough pile of pennies and have it magically produce infinite wealth. The two are qualitatively different.

The serial tragedies of history, both individual and global, can be comprehended from this perspective. You get an idea you like, and then you want to destroy anyone who hasn't come to the same conclusion. Where we should, like Jan, embrace the amorphous Absolute as our inspiration to energize our life, endlessly expanding its boundaries, our default setting impels us to substitute trivial and transient notions and fling them onto the screen of the ineffable. Then we really have an environment to complain about.

This reminds me of the atheist poster Baird passed along this week:

Morality is doing what is right regardless of what you are told.
Religion is doing what you are told regardless of what is right.

Yes, I know it's an oversimplification, but it has a nice ring to it.

Attachment to life is possibly the deepest of all the afflictions. From the moment the royal sperm came to be firmly attached to its royal seat of honor, we have been bent upon experiencing this world. We take it for granted in every cell of our body. But it doesn't take a yogi to foresee that we are going to drop out of this game eventually. Patanjali's advice here is to get used to the idea in advance, because it will lessen the pain when the time comes. It's not at all easy. It means giving up what you love as totally as what you are happy to be rid of. I often think of a friend's grandmother, a Texas holy-roller who went through life absolutely certain that she was going up to heaven after she died, into the arms of Jesus. Like many passionate "religious" types, she

entertained not a shred of doubt. Doubt was a crime in her world view. But when death came knocking, all her certainties fell away. She spent her last two weeks bathed in terror, inconsolable. Undone. Most of us cling to similar but more subtle versions of the same theme. Patanjali very kindly wants to spare us such a tragic ending, so he does not offer any fairy tale about what comes next.

Let's close with a reprise of Nitya's simple and elegant assertion: "Although a situation is unavoidable, it may be possible to improve it.... You can use your intelligence to mitigate the suffering coming from unavoidable situations." The gurus have bequeathed us a rich banquet of methods for overcoming our afflictions and gaining our freedom; all we have to do is take them up and put them into practice.

Part II

Susan elaborated a bit on what she was thinking, a worthy addition, thank you:

Nitya explains Sutra II:16, "The pain that has not yet come is to be avoided," by describing the five miseries which commonly torment us. Through his commentary, Nitya explains how we can avoid the pain of each of these miseries by working to correct/adjust our perspective and perceptions of the world and ourselves.

When I heard you read this last night, I was thinking about my own tendency not only to be caught by the miseries but also to anticipate their pain. Nitya touches on this when he says (near the end of the commentary), "You can keep emotional stress states from creating compulsions in your behavior." The stress states can cause me to look at the glass half empty and assume the worst.

That is my compulsion. I feel the pain before it ever has the chance to arrive, because I am imagining the way things will be. I guess it's like seeing a preview of a movie. Not only am seeing things as they are projected in my mind and forgetting that they are a

projection, but I imagine the bloody murder scene even while the film is still in the bucolic introduction. I guess this means I have a kind of double layer of baggage/projection to become aware of and release.

This resonates well with Nitya's line, "Nightmares come out of you because you have irrational fears lurking in your mind. By going deeply into the areas of the mind and illuminating them with the inner light of the Self, this darkness will go."